

Crises and renewals: reasons for making and teaching History

Crisis y renovaciones: razones para hacer y enseñar historia

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Abstract

This article addresses the current connection between History as a discipline and the teaching of History, with special attention paid to the result of this connection, reflected in a critical renewal of history that meets the current needs of society. To this end, it addresses the current crisis in the discipline of History and stresses the loss of confidence in traditional methods and approaches. However, despite this 'crisis', it advocates an optimistic vision of the future, insofar as it can serve as an opportunity for renewing historiography. It further emphasises the importance of including new perspectives and voices in History, leading to a certain decentralisation of the discipline. It questions the impact of information technologies on teaching History and research, as they must be accompanied by the development of students' critical thinking skills. The article also highlights the importance of History in understanding identity and contemporary challenges and advocates a vision of History as a critical social instrument. In this sense, it raises the need for a global history that connects local spheres with global ones, integrating diverse themes and approaches. Finally, it underscores historians' responsibility for education and public discussion, emphasising that knowledge of the past is essential for making ethical decisions in the present and future.

Key words: Historiography; teaching of history; public use of the past; education.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda la conexión actual entre la Historia como disciplina y la enseñanza de la Historia, con especial atención a la resultante de dicho binomio plasmada en una renovación crítica de la historia que responda a las necesidades actuales de la sociedad. Para ello, se aborda la crisis actual de la disciplina histórica y se subraya la disminución de la confianza en métodos y enfoques tradicionales, al tiempo que, a pesar de esta "crisis", se aboga por una visión de futuro optimista, en la medida que las crisis pueden ser oportunidades para la renovación de la historiografía. Asimismo, se enfatiza la importancia de integrar nuevas perspectivas y voces en la Historia, lo que conduce a una cierta descentralización de la disciplina, y se pone en cuestión el impacto de las tecnologías de la información en la enseñanza y la investigación histórica, por cuanto debe ir acompañada del desarrollo de un pensamiento crítico en los estudiantes. El texto también resalta la importancia de la Historia en la comprensión de la identidad y los desafíos contemporáneos,

y propugna una visión de la Historia como un instrumento social crítico. En este sentido, se plantea la necesidad de una historia global que conecte lo local con lo global, integrando diversas temáticas y enfoques. Por último, se subraya la responsabilidad de los historiadores en la educación y en el debate público, haciendo énfasis en que el conocimiento del pasado es imprescindible para la toma de decisiones éticas en el presente y futuro.

Palabras clave: Historiografía; enseñanza de la Historia; uso público del pasado; educación.

The ‘crisis’ of History and of teaching History: a commitment to its critical social role

The word ‘crisis’ seems to constantly be looming over the discipline of History. It has frequently been used to refer to the loss of confidence and the decline of forms of knowledge, methods and views that were once dominant in historiography. Today, it could even be argued that the apparent signs of weakness and of changes resulting in profound consequences has become even more pronounced. In Spanish historiography, this marked discouragement is partially rooted in professional problems related to the teaching and research structure, how it works and how it brings on new generations of professional historians. But beyond the situation in Spain, questions about the social function of History and historians in today’s societies have become international in scope, and this trend has only continued over time.

Despite what we have asserted thus far, the authors of this article are confident about History, whilst still remaining cautious and relatively sceptical about its current situation. It is true that the decline of old teleological, deterministic and totalising interpretations has led to a present that is sometimes rather insecure for historiography. However, the proclaimed *end of History* at the turn of the twenty-first century was followed by observations that History had instead *returned* (Morales Moya, 1992, pp. 11-13). Though the discipline has certainly changed at least to some extent, we can also say that its true or, in some cases, imaginary crises have been linked to some of its own forms of renewal. In fact, according to Eley, multiple perspectives and approaches and the inclusion of new views and voices helped to *decentralise* the historiographic discipline, bringing more protagonists onto the stage of History (Eley, 2008).

Furthermore, demonstrating the need to define History’s social meaning and function, it has also been suggested at some point that we all perform its necessary ‘repairs’, which will allow us to ‘(...) prepare it for a difficult and uncertain future’ (Fontana, 1992, pp. 145-146). However, these repairs must be made in a context marked by the impact of information technologies on today’s societies, among other issues. A few years ago, Pons warned that the advent of what were then called ‘new’ information and communication technologies (ICTs) had not only changed how we were doing research, but also how we handled ourselves within the ‘digital membrane’ in which we live, both in terms of how we *read* and how we write and disseminate the findings of our research. According to Pons, a transformation has occurred that will be even ‘more profound and irremediable in the future’, both in the practice of historiography and elsewhere. Therefore, historians’ attitudes and aptitudes will be crucial in shaping the evolution of what they have been calling ‘digital history’. This is something that has had and will continue to have an extraordinary impact on how History is taught and studied (Pons, 2013a; Pons, 2013b, pp. 15-16).

However, a certain degree of scepticism towards discourses that appeal to the ICT and digitalisation ‘revolution’ is in order, as not all the outcomes of this kind of ‘cybernetic utopia’ are positive. Specifically, Riemen warns us about the current dangers of using new technologies in teaching, especially giving students too much information without guiding them and showing them

exactly what to do with it. At the very least, this requires trying to foster critical thinking in the use of Big Data in education, because even though it allows for flexibility and personalisation (mobile e-learning, gamification, combined learning based on the flipped classroom and blended learning) (Salazar, 2016), it needs criteria to select, filter systematise and contrast the mass of digitalised information and data (Riemen, 2017). Methods for managing Big Data as a series of historical events are still new today, but students must be trained and able to use them for historical research. At the same time, the discipline must equip them with criteria so they can discern which data are applicable and which are not (Guldi & Armitage, 2016).¹ In this way, it would be possible for historical knowledge to regain the critical and transformative function required for understanding the world in which we live.

We must bear in mind that it is increasingly important to recover the past as a tool for recognising signs of identity and for recognising ourselves, especially given all the aforementioned challenges and uncertainties. This is especially true when relating with our social, cultural and environmental surroundings with confidence and imagination, as they largely shape the challenges and possibilities of the future. The landscape in which we work has undoubtedly become more complex, but perhaps more intriguing as well for that very reason. In this new atmosphere, we have not lost confidence in the purpose, role and social function of History in the course of the new millennium, which is now inextricably associated with the controversial potential of the geological interval known as the ‘Anthropocene’ (Rull, 2018).

Reality in historical discourse: an indispensable hypothesis

Extreme subjectivism and the hegemony of symbolism, some of whose expressions have delegitimised the cognitive pretensions of historiography, must be appropriately nuanced. Here, we would do well to recall what Vidal-Naquet wrote almost twenty years ago (2008):

If the historian has lost his innocence, if he is taken as an object, if he himself takes himself as an object—who should feel sorry about this? It is established that if historical discourse did not adhere, through as many intermediaries as it wishes, to what we must call reality, for lack of a better term, we would always be in discourse, but that discourse would also stop being historical.

Reality consists of objectivity and subjectivity, shaped by their interconnectivity (Accardo & Corcuff, 1986). From this point of view, thinking about, understanding and recounting History without considering its socioeconomic context strikes us as inadequate. This does not entail denying or ceasing to pay attention to action, subjectivity, the unconscious, etc. (Bourdieu, 1991). Some of the ever-suggestive and controversial ideas of the late sociologist Bourdieu can be very useful for historiography in this sense, insofar as they include a space for action and the individual within the framework of historical structures and temporalities with which we historians work (Bourdieu, 1989). Thus, these same structures possess nothing eternal or absolute; they are the result of History, the temporary materialisation of a state of force and of struggles between individuals, groups and institutions that are simultaneously also a product of History. Coming from another discipline, these approaches can ultimately foster theoretical reflection in our work, preventing us from falling into the easy temptation of denying objectivity and scientific rigour in historiography, seeking refuge in a comfortable and well-written *neo-historicism*. Indeed, we need a strong epistemological framework,

¹ Jo Guldi and David Armitage suggest that students should be provided with knowledge about the Big Think Internet forum (<https://bigthink.com/>) founded in 2007, which programmes activities with talks by specialists in different fields of the social sciences and culture.

which will allow us, among other things, to successfully strengthen the critical function that we understand as inherent to History (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 2000) in the complex and changing world of globalisation. And though this does not mean that we should present ourselves as specialists in epistemology and methodology, it is a crucial step not only for research, obviously, but also for understanding how to convey historical knowledge to students at different levels of education.

From our point of view, the practice of History should assume a global perspective, unlike some inherited legacies, built on the basis of integrating, and not just joining or attaching, fragments of histories chopped into pieces that are often presented to us today (Fontana, 1992; Fontana, 2006). It is now more necessary than ever to resume a view of globalisation that is by no means totally incompatible with *postmodernity* (Morales Moya, 1987). After the ‘critical turn’ associated with the fourth generation of the *Annales*, Gruzinski warned that the composition of the societies that make up the world today is not the same as the one that justified how History had been ‘conceived’ and ‘done’ until recently, often shaped by a single narrative and with a clear Eurocentric focus (Gruzinski, 2018, p. 244). Prior to this, Noiriel had proposed a historiographical programme that was largely a renewed and reconstructed version of Bloch’s project, identified with sociohistory, a trend in research that goes back more than two decades and combines the founding principles of History and Sociology (Noiriel, 1997). Today’s main issues lie at the heart of Noiriel’s proposal, such as globalism and capitalism, state bureaucratisation and media influence (Noiriel, 2011). These are all long-term historical processes that have been relatively neglected for the last three decades. More recently, as British author David Armitage and American author Jo Guldi write in the opening line of their book *The History Manifesto*, ‘A spectre is haunting our time: the spectre of the short term’.² They argue that some of the chief problems facing current societies, such as climate change and growing economic inequality, must be understood in terms of decades and centuries. Hence, they call for taking a more inclusive and long-term approach to historical research, recovering History as a process that revitalises its social function as an instrument of knowledge and a tool for improving the development of humanity by shifting away from a historiography that has focused for decades on increasingly singular and specific periods, phenomena, episodes and figures. The approach they advocate would involve recovering Braudel’s *longue durée*, though not simply by going back to it, but rather by critically returning to the past to refresh knowledge. In other words, it would seek to establish a permanent dialogue between the past and the present to shed light on the future, positioned to promote a global history to broaden the scale of study. This would entail decompartmentalising and connecting phenomena that are often separated in order to restore the explanatory ambitions of History and help to reestablish an understanding of the public utility of historians’ work (Guldi & Armitage, 2016, pp. 117-118).

And yet, *what is Global History?* To avoid adopting it as a simple label, a new product with some measure of success in the academic historiographical market, we must provide a response that is not so easy to come by. If what we are talking about is returning to an updated version of world history or the old History of Civilisations, a History of International Relations or a superposition of searches and texts aimed at providing a global overview of a given century, it may not be beneficial for historiographic practice. A global perspective entails focusing on the links that societies have woven between them, the interactions and complexes that make them up, as well as the interlacing of the human, social, economic, religious and political pieces that tend to make the world uniform or that clash with and resist movement in that direction (Gruzinski, 2018; Drayton & Mota, 2018). In conclusion, the compartmentalisation, reframing and reconnection proper to Comparative History, which already has a long tradition, is not enough to create a Global History. It is the local world that

² This book caused some controversy when it was first published in open access in 2014. In light of the circumstances, it is worth rereading today.

takes on the character of a crossroads, since no history can fulfil a global ambition without a local base with an exact location. However, to move beyond the local world, historians must eschew the rules of the monograph and any type of restrictive microhistory, interweaving the histories of the nation and the local setting, individuals and small and isolated spaces (Gruzinski, 2018, p. 244). This does not rule out the need for highly focused and exhaustively documented studies on the history of labour, racial and religious minorities, women, immigrants and LGBTQ+ people. Ultimately, among other proposals, Global History is a sufficiently solid potential alternative that may be able to offer a new paradigm that integrates the various specialties and themes, the diverse temporal sequences and the many different spatial areas. As Ginzburg has recently argued, ‘microhistory and macrohistory, close analysis and global perspective, are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they reinforce each other’ (Ginzburg, 2024). Both short-term analysis and long-term overview should be combined to produce a more intense, sensitive and ethical summary of data (Drayton & Mota, 2018), posing a difficult challenge for historians today and in the future.

This aspiration to globality should also be wedded to a desire to address the results of our work to all those who can read and listen to us. In other words, it should force us, in turn, to speak about what may be important for most of society, such as its real problems and the issues of human beings in time, and to do so comprehensibly, without neglecting the complexity of the discipline.

The pace of life today and the *presentism* that followed the ‘end of History’ indicate the need to restore the connection between the past and the future. Since the 1970s, the pronounced specialisation of the discipline has distanced historians from these long-term perspectives. This is one of the reasons why they have lost the ability to influence politics, understood as the public space of debate par excellence, beyond, of course, the identification between politics and political parties or merely institutional matters. Thus, long-term views of the past can, in particular, reestablish the connection between history, political planning and public debate on the future—a direction that has characterised large sections of the Western historical tradition with a common conviction since classical times: knowledge of the past is ‘a necessary precondition of making ethical decisions about how to conduct a society’ (Guldi & Armitage, 2016).

Those of us who are dedicated to teaching, and especially to teaching History, have an essential role to play in these aforementioned objectives. We must help the new generations, meaning our students, continue to be able to reason, question and criticise. We must show them that far from being beleaguered by an irreversible and final ‘crisis’, History is constantly undergoing an enriching methodological renewal and is still one of the fullest ways to understand the world they live in. We must teach them a complex global history in which objectivity and subjectivity, the economic and cultural spheres, action and structures, the individual and the collective, all have a place. It must be a History expressed with language and must therefore possess a narrative clarity that can transmit knowledge comprehensibly to the largest number of people possible. And it must be a critical history, without absolute certainties, rigorous in the analysis and use of sources, devoid of any type of documentary hierarchies, committed to comparing the object of study with other realities, even if this requires knowledge of other languages and the necessary effort to understand other pasts and approach other certainties.

Audiences for conversations about the past

After vanishing from public conversation, displaced by other disciplines, particularly economics and political science, some have claimed that from 2019 onwards, History had begun to hit rock

bottom in the educational and academic spheres as well (Mayayo, 2019a). That same year, historian and journalist Eric Alterman, who maintained his column *Altercation* for 30 years, until January 2023, warned of the decline in historical thought in American public universities (Alterman, 2019). However, it remained fundamental among the most elitist universities that educate the country's ruling classes, as proven by their enrolment figures.

Also during that same year, demonstrations and protests in Italy managed to somehow halt the attempt to remove specific History content from the entrance exam, initially sponsored by the Commissione Serianni appointed by the centre-left Gentiloni government (2016-2018). Meanwhile, Spanish universities were subjected to remarkable cuts in teaching staff and funding for historical research. This series of events, owing not so much to manipulation as to a disdain for History, indicates decay in the quality of democracies, sustaining and strengthening mythologies of the past that not only reject enquiry into the 'historical truth', but deny its very existence (Mayayo, 2019b).

Moreover, university and professional history 'seems to be a secondary and minor road compared to the motorway of television series today' or to 'the dissemination of history by amateur journalists who never mention their sources' (Casanova, 2020, pp. 283-284). Ultimately, we can see that a significant swath of the population voluntarily and involuntarily uses various means to consume stories, narratives, overviews and books with powerful and occasionally dubious and debatable historical content. It is easy to notice that there is a demand to understand the past. Each society has a specific demand for history that forges its relationship with it according to its own needs. This multifaceted demand is met by various means and different groups. The question is: Who meets it? Various situations can arise. The publishing and media space can be covered by professional historians through widely distributed work or contributions to academic magazines, as well as by journalists, amateurs and even novelists. In this regard, we only need to consider the large number of widely distributed historical magazines in Spain that are important to the reading public, such as *Sàpiens*, *Clío*, *La Aventura de la Historia*, *Revista de Historia* and many others, to give just a few examples.

We also must keep in mind that history is consumed continuously today and that a historical discourse or one that appeals to the past in some way is being created, criticised and spread in almost all areas of thought. This is especially the case with audiovisual media and popular media such as comics and illustrated history,³ to the point that historians often only come into contact with the educated public by participating in television documentary series, discussions sparked by the success of some 'historical' film or certain commemorative events. Opinion articles in the press, tourism promotion and radio programmes also convey and construct a certain idea of the past. However, today we can also find different examples of specialists from other disciplines treating History as important (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019b, pp. 39, 55-62, 121-151, 504 and 536; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019a, pp. 367, 380-383; Castells, 2017, p. 110; Geiselberger, 2017, pp. 53-54, 167; Rodrik, 2018, p. 316), in addition to other writers and intellectuals whose work is widely circulated and the topic of public discussion (Mishra, 2017, pp. 13-14, 19 and 30; Mishra, 2020, pp. 61, 70-71, 159-175 and 194).

Gruzinski thinks that to meet future audiences' demands for the past, we must write and speak about the past and future in public, so that our ideas can be easily shared. This dedication to the public foreshadows three new trends in writing History: first, the need for new narratives that can be read and understood by non-experts; second, a focus on visualisation and digital tools; third, the merger of the large and the small, the 'micro' and the 'macro', which makes the best use of archival work on one hand; and fourth, work on issues of common interest, based on the need to restore the connection between the past and the future. In this regard, we might add that the purpose of History, if we choose to accept it, would be to rewrite our relationship with nature, our relationship with technology and the

³ One such example is the publication of the graphic adaptation of Antony Beevor's bestseller, aimed to be the general public's gateway to the Spanish Civil War (Beevor, 2020). Along the same lines, but for the Spanish dictatorship, see Pontón, 2023.

inequality between countries, people, races and sexes, and to do so in a way that the general public can understand (Gruzinski, 2018, p. 213).

Moreover, an overabundant and saturated memory emerged forcefully in the 2000s. Used as a synonym for History, it has led to a ‘commemorative obsession’ in the European memorial landscape. As Traverso has pointed out, the political dimension of memory and the abuses accompanying it have affected how History is written (Traverso, 2006, pp. 11-12 and 20). This requires rising to the challenge of building a future audience for the past and rethinking how we regard that past.

However, we will continually lose ground if we dedicate ourselves to History whilst ignoring others whose work connects us to the past, such as filmmakers, visual artists, choreographers, novelists and all those who reflect the foundations of our present. Many of these products not only can be, and in fact are, incentives for the historian’s profession, to put it in classical terms, but they also indicate current issues and sometimes even offer a critical and constructive standpoint that is now more necessary than ever (Gruzinski, 2018). In brief, the formative influence that the media and entertainment wield over audiences often replaces the sway that great nineteenth-century serial historical novels and school education once held. Historiography cannot underestimate analysing this either.

With regard to audiences, we ought to discuss the many shortcomings that still burden the transmission of historical knowledge, content and method in our classrooms. This is what we have verified in our analysis of the structural elements that contribute institutionally to determining the approach to teaching History, jointly and correlatedly, starting with the textbooks most recently used in secondary schools, either exclusively or complementarily, given their importance in classrooms. In any case, these are probably the last or only history books that most people ever read (Tappi & Tébar Hurtado, 2024). The widespread use of text books, particularly by students, is a formidable example of the public use of the past, though with the important difference that by their very nature, the propagation of their content is mediated by teachers.

However, our analysis does not solely focus on textbooks, but also on curricula and final exams. Everything indicates that we must take a more critical stance, which tends to a problematising reading of historical phenomena and recovers their breadth and complexity. The shortcomings here are confirmed by the evidence that the skills required of students are limited to the passive assimilation of information, without going beyond it. This suppresses the acquisition of mental habits prepared to contrast and compare well-founded but divergent interpretations, as required by the epistemic and methodological status of the discipline. The possible consequence of all this is that the study of History may be easily trivialised—which is undoubtedly the most harmful thing that can happen in school—and it may reproduce and encourage readings supporting a deceptive and manipulative use of the past.

The results of our research indicate that, far from a serious, detailed study in line with historiographical discussion, the account of even two crucial events in the history of the respective countries, such as Spain’s transition to democracy and the Italian resistance, remains tightly connected to its instrumental role in nation-building. Instead, it would be desirable for syllabi, exams and textbooks to begin to include broader perspectives less beholden to late nineteenth-century paradigms. By paying more attention to Social History and without detracting from potentially conflicting elements, even the ‘subaltern classes’ would be considered bearers of their own meaning and agency, regardless of their location in monocausal prefigurations of historical change. Ultimately, what stands out in this study is that the way that Spain’s transition to democracy and the Italian resistance are taught in schools does not send students the message that a parliamentary regime must be built ‘from below’, though it does make the issue of the conquest of democracy central. It also does not teach them how to use tools to help them to develop a critical and conscious perspective on knowledge of the past,

understanding it as a right of citizenship.

In any case, the results we have reached should be understood as a step towards the development of future research, coordinated internationally and based on comparing school systems in different countries. In this regard, some points of a possible research agenda ought to be defined. Firstly, however traumatic, conflictive or ‘divisive’ it may have been, the recent past still occupies a central place in the political and cultural imagination in society today. Therefore, it is an especially important motivator and a necessary educational priority that can provide meaning to the study of History as a discipline and help us to understand the immediate foundations of the present (Cajani, Lässig & Repoussi, 2019).

The second point has to do more generally with teachers’ relationship to teaching Contemporary History specifically. More so than in other times, in addition to transmitting historical knowledge, these teachers are also witnesses of events or interact with an individual and collective memory that is still active. This makes it useful and necessary to examine the ‘lacking, unconscious and ambiguous’ links between history, memory and the public use of the past (Silvani, 2005, pp. 196-197). The third point is related to disciplinary training, because when interacting with students, teachers pass on and rework the historical knowledge constructed in the halls of academia. In Spain, for example, universities should give greater importance not only to Contemporary History as a whole, but also to more recent history, in compliance with the Democratic Memory Law of 2022. In fact, to date only half of 42 History faculties include in their study plans compulsory six-credit exams related to Francoism, the transition to democracy, democracy and twentieth-century Spain (Fuertes Muñoz & Banderas Navarro, 2024, pp. 346-347). Finally, we are aware that the way we teach and tell the history of the past shapes how the present grasps its potential, as Drayton writes (Drayton, 2011, pp. 671-685).

The string of crises since the start of the twenty-first century may indicate that short-term views work fine when there are no problems, but they quickly become inadequate once crises arise. This is why Guldi and Armitage conclude: ‘Never before now has it been so vital that we all become experts on the long-term view, that we return to the *longue durée*. Renewing the connection between past and future, and using the past to think critically about what is to come, are the tools that we need now. Historians are those best able to supply them’ (Guldi & Armitage, 2016, p. 35). This is not because the historian is a ‘magician who can completely reveal the past’, nor a skilled healer who can cure it. Rather, the historian can act as ‘a guide who encourages reading and thinking critically’ (Casanova, 2020, pp. 383-384).

Thinking about the present in historical terms

Although the contours of the present are never precise enough and the past is not predetermined, having useful tools available to approach thinking about the present in historical terms, starting from the contemporary world, is an incentive to ‘go back in time’ (Gruzinski, 2018, p. 16). The purpose of History, as Bédarida said, is to ‘modestly discover truths, even if they are partial and precarious, partially deciphering the myths and memories in all their richness’ (Casanova, 2020, p. 285). This discipline can foster this encounter between the past and the future. As Bloch said, ‘Moreover, this solidarity between the ages is so strong that the bonds of intelligibility between them truly have a double meaning’. Bloch also argued when contemplating the historian’s profession that ‘the misunderstanding of the present inevitably arises from ignorance of the past. But perhaps it is just as futile to try to understand the past if one knows nothing of the present’ (Bloch, 2021, pp. 70-71).

We might think that ‘History is nothing if it is not tied to pedagogy, political ethics and a belief in the future’ (Eley, 2018, pp. 23-24) because if ‘ignorance of the past is not only harmful to knowledge of the present, but also compromises action in the present’ (Bloch, 2001), this triggers a series of questions addressed at both the historian and the common person, both of whom must answer basic questions about what, when, how, who, why and for whom if they are to critically grasp the reality of both the past and the present (Vilar, 1997).

For all these reasons, we find it even more incomprehensible that the institutional players in charge of funding academic activity continue to stress the discipline’s inability to spread its knowledge to society. This is a challenge that historians should aim to overcome by getting involved in the problems of the present through their academic practice (teaching and research),⁴ worrying about the future, thinking historically and trying to build a grammar of critical reading based on the application of historical reasoning to today’s world (Suau & Veiga, 2015, p. 137).

Indeed, *thinking historically* to understand—or to somewhat improve understanding of—much of today’s world has been established as the competence-based hallmark of teaching in recent years. It is important to remember that there is a very lively discussion going on that, *grosso modo*, pits two models for teaching History against each other: one model that emphasises conceptual knowledge and another that prioritises the competence-based approach. This debate is associated with and stems from occasionally bitter criticism of the traditionally hegemonic model for teaching History, dominated as it is by the transmission of concepts, dates, data and facts of the past to acquire conceptual and factual content through memorisation (Sáiz & Fuster, 2014; Carretero & López, 2009; Prats & Santacana, 2011). This approach is often contrasted with another that stresses the competence-based learning of History. In any case, a third way that integrates both seems to be picking up steam, aimed at striking a balance by combining knowledge of the past with skill in History and historical procedures (Sáiz, 2014, p. 84). In other words, ‘It is important to know what happened, but also how we know it happened’ (Domínguez, 2015, p. 44). Or, as Jorge Sáiz and Ramón López (2015, p. 89) express in similar terms:

- a) The way of presenting the past by resorting to historical knowledge, dates, facts, figures, concepts and so on, which is referred to as substantive or first-order content; and b) strategic skills to give meaning to knowledge, understood as second-order content or meta-concepts, which take concrete form in skill to address and interpret historical issues and to understand the past as is done in historical research.

We could therefore construct historical thought through the combined activation of both knowledge of the past and certain strategic skills or historical meta-concepts (Lévesque, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013). From this perspective, and despite the constant reworking, we find it appropriate to outline—even if briefly—the historical meta-concepts that, as has been said, might allow for the development of historical thought. Some authors, such as Jesús Domínguez, ground historical thought in four major historical concepts: the use of evidence and historical sources; causal explanation; contextualised or empathetic explanation; and time, change and continuity (Domínguez, 2015). However, despite the value of this conceptualisation, Seixas and Morton’s approach has become the most complete model, as it integrates up to six historical meta-concepts associated with six issues that historians must face in their work. In other words, the construction of historical thought is based in this case on six major concepts summarised by fundamental questions: How do we decide what is important to know about the past? (historical importance); How do we know the past? (evidence); How do we make sense of the flow of History? (continuity and change); Why did events of the past

⁴ For a defence of this position, as well as a brilliant study on the production and consumption of history, see Trouillot, 2017.

happen and what impact did they have? (causes and consequences); How can we better understand the people of the past? (historical perspective); and, ultimately, How can History help us to experience the present? (ethical dimension) (Seixas & Morton, 2013, pp. 5-6; Ponce, 2015, p. 226).

In contrast to this approach, we might consider that ‘revisionisms’ (understood not as revision or reinterpretation, but as the construction of myths and anti-myths) have been a challenge for History for decades. Sometimes we are told to ignore them because they cannot be stopped. However, this phenomenon has expanded and had an impact on historiography, in which the strategy to combat it would be to follow another path, as Vidal-Naquet (2004, pp. 117-118) warned us in the early twenty-first century:

In connection with revisionist writings, there has even been talk of intellectual excrement. I accept this expression, but there are laboratories where excrement is analysed. Since when are lies, falsehoods, myths and the imaginary no longer objects of historical study?

In short, we would even need to try to show the added value of History compared to other disciplines, to pose questions and show evidence related to the key issues primarily affecting problems raised in the present (Suau & Veiga, 2015, pp. 146-148). This issue may even be more pressing given that we have entered new scenarios where rational words and criteria (Thompson, 2017) have largely been displaced by fake news, misinformation or poor-quality information, which are potentially highly corrosive for public discussions in which historians were involved decades ago. We obviously must not abandon or stop participating in these public discussions, and even less so in these times of crisis, of false narratives and fake stories, since historical thinking could help to free us from the supposedly *natural* laws on the functioning of the state, the market and the destiny of the planet.

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